

Lullaby

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Submitted: January 3, 2006

Updated: January 3, 2006

Shonen-Ai/Slash. ONE-SHOT. For Alicifer. Touch those you hold dearest to yourself, and never let them go...

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1 - [Cherub]

Lullaby

-[For Alicifer, for all of those who have loved and lost.]-

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Nathaniel stared down at the boy.

He was small, thin and gaunt, curled up in the long, uncut blades of grass, just now loosing the early morning dew. If one had been farther away, one would've probably never even seen him.

The boy's chest rose and fell softly, breathing even and relaxed, though the torn, stained leftovers of the clothing he was wearing had to be cold and wet. The leaves were crisped brown and red on the fringes from the first chill whisper of autumn, rustling impatiently to themselves, sighing.

Nathaniel pulled off his sunglasses, flicked them closed and slipped them into the pocket of his black pants, where his car keys jingled and the metal hissed coolly when his fingers brushed it. He kept his hands in his pockets, still staring down at the boy on the ground, curled up almost protectively around the slab of gray stone. Lying on top of the grave of Nathaniel's mother.

He blinked in the still-soft sunlight, pale eyes staring expressionlessly at the fresh, clean-cut piece of granite stone, at the words chipped into it, neat and orderly, words that he'd learned by verbatim, carved into his own mind and soul and memory.

Nathaniel blinked again as he saw the boy stir, face scrunching, body curling up tighter for a second before stretching out, only to freeze as liquid, dark eyes met his own. The boy blinked back at him through a tangled mess of dark hair, smudges of dirt on his cheek, neck, and arms. The small, thin fingers tightened around a handful of drying, wilting wildflowers, daisies and little blue and violet flowers almost too miniature to see and a rich, dusty yellow dandelion, the last of the season.

The boy's brows furrowed, face showing fear, body lying still, breathing almost indistinguishable, as if he were a hunted animal and that, by remaining still and pretending he wasn't there, he could escape whatever was chasing him, hunting him.

Nathaniel took a slow step forward, and the boy cringed, drew up onto his hands and knees still crouched on the ground, ready to flee.

Perhaps a runaway boy for too long? An orphan? A changeling child left to die?

Nathaniel sat down onto the moist ground, only watching with mild interest as the boy slipped backwards, dark eyes settled on him, bare fingers digging into the loose, easy dirt. His feet were bare. He reached out, black sleeve of his jacket brushing the wet blades of grass, and gingerly touched the petals and stems of the now-scattered flowers.

"...You give these to her?"

His voice was soft, calm, soothing. The boy stayed where he was, caught between running away and staying to observe this new stranger, to be accepted into uncertain, perhaps imaginary arms of warmth and comfort. He sat back on his haunches, fingers pulling at blades of grass so they soon became wet, but never pulling them out.

Nathaniel took his silence as easily as an answer, sighing as he loosened the black tie around his neck, which was too tight. His watch had been tucked away into his other pocket earlier, perhaps so he wouldn't have to bother with living in the fleeting, rushed lives of men, to be able to escape into the

closest thing to eternity for just an instant.

The boy remained where he was, shaking his head quickly to swish the loose, dark curls of hair from his face.

"...It's nice of you, I suppose," Nathaniel added, reaching forward and gently letting his fingertips run over the cold, rough stone face, purposely ignoring the careful, orderly print of the carved letters. He sighed, then moved to sit with his back against the gravestone, relaxing his arms on his knees, staring up at the sky. The boy had flinched again, but he had not run away.

Nathaniel closed his eyes, let the wind whisper softly as it trickled past his ear, warming with the rising air.

"...It's more than I do for her."

He blinked open an eye to see the boy slowly crawling closer, wary, anxious. Nervous? What was he expecting?

"...Mom," the boy whispered quietly.

Nathaniel turned his head now to fully look at the other, light eyes unwavering, steady. "My mom," he said. "...She loved me, loved everyone, loved God, never blamed Him when... ..even when... she died. Of cancer."

Nathaniel closed his eyes again, gratified to exist in this short span, to forget about life and remember only her face, her smile, her laughter and warm eyes. He felt only a soft sorrow, having long since learned to guard himself from the pain and sadness, turning to the cool indifference of apathy, of emotionless existence in the little eddy of the mainstream.

"...Mom," the boy whispered again, suddenly next to him, cool fingers touching his own over the crushed petals and stalks of the wild daisies and dandelions.

"Mom," the boy said once more, this time a sob. He crawled like an infant into Nathaniel's lap, bent his head with its dark curls against the clean, pressed-white of the crisp shirt underneath, and cried, small sobs shaking his lean frame.

Nathaniel paused, then slowly ran a hand over the boy's back, gently rubbing, soothing. His pale eyes stared down at the boy, watching as he openly weeped for something real or imagined ingrained in his fragile mind, something burning that made his desperate, wild heart bleed.

Nathaniel watched him, and he saw the hidden emotions and fears and tears of another boy who'd lost his mother at the tender age of thirteen, but who'd capped up his sadness and regret and left behind only a hollow shell of his being, never given this one chance to cry out his heart and soul those four long years ago, never having had anyone to turn to for the comforting arms and the consoling, guardian voice and mutual, wordless understanding.

And he realized then how much he had lost, but he couldn't bring back the grief and the sadness, which had faded away, like water splashed onto stones and grass and sand, left to dry.

"...Shh," he found himself whispering, "It's okay..."

Nathaniel brushed the boy's wet cheeks, tipped up his chin to kiss him gently on the forehead, wrapping the boy up tightly in his arms, startled by the warm, frantic beating of the little heart against his own.

And from a darkened, almost forever shadowed corner of his mind, he remembered something else about his mother.

Gently, Nathaniel wiped the tears from the boy's cheeks, rubbing his back to slow the rapid, uneven gasps of breath torn from fragile lungs. He leaned down over the boy, lips pressing softly against his pale forehead, tasting morning dew and uncut grass and dark, springy curls of hair.

"...Hush now, little angel, little cherub so dear..."

Nathaniel remembered the old lullaby his mother used to sing to him, and he whispered the words quietly into the small ear of the boy in his arms, lips close enough to touch the skin, to brush the tangled strands of dew-wetted hair.

And something inside of him melted, welling up inside of him until he felt it escape as hot, sighing tears from his eyes, dripping down off his face to become new drops of dew on the grass beneath him, hanging like little glass beads from the uncropped ends. Nathaniel cried silently and shortly, and when he blinked and wiped the last of the wetness from his eyes, he looked calm and collected as always. The boy looked up at him with his moist, dark eyes, and he reached up and touched Nathaniel's cheek gently, delicately.

Nathaniel smiled, something he had not done in a long time, running a hand through the boy's hair. And for just a little while more, Nathaniel was content to hold the boy in his arms and let the two of them drift away into momentary, fleeting eternity.

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